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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Christmas Turkey -- 50-50, or 100 percent

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Morse Salisbury, Radio Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, December 17, 1936.

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MR. SALISBURY: Now back on our regular Thursday schedule again, here's the Household Calendar coming up, and as usual it is presided over by that friend of all homemakers, Ruth Van Deman. Today I understand she comes prepared to give you the latest scientific information on cooking that great delicacy -- the 1936 streamlined, made-in-America turkey.

MISS VAN DEMAN: A 100-percent-American, you'll be calling it next, Morse.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, it is as a matter of fact -- with ancestors right back to those wild turkey hens and gobblers hunted by the Indian tribes of North America. And I'm all for 100 percent turkeys also. I have my fingers crossed on these new-fangled 50-50 turkeys.

MISS VAN DEMAN: 50-50 turkeys?

MR. SALISBURY: Yes. This way of cutting a turkey in two, and selling the halves separately.

MISS VAN DEMAN: That's to suit the kitchenette stove and the dinette family, for people who can't take care of a whole big turkey.

MR. SALISBURY: Maybe so. But you know how I feel about turkey stuffing. And I don't like my turkey half stuffed. And wouldn't you have to half-stuff a half turkey?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, you wouldn't have to. You should have seen the half turkeys that Lucy Alexander and Nancy Clarke roasted in our experimental kitchen. Of course it takes a lot of skewering and sewing to fasten the skin down around the edges, so it won't draw up and leave the meat bare when the heat of the oven strikes it. And after the stuffing is piled into the hollow on the inside of the half turkey, it has to be covered with parchment paper to make the stuffing stay put. Then the 50-50 turkey, as you call it, is flipped over and placed on a rack in the roasting pan. From that point on, it's treated just about like a whole bird.

MR. SALISBURY: I'm not so sure I'd know how to treat it with the carving knife when it came to the table.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I think you would, all right. With a few changes in your regular technique.

(over)

Now to go back to cooking technique. There's a lot of discussion these days about how to roast a turkey. Whether to have the oven very hot when you put the bird in, and then reduce the heat as soon as the turkey has browned. Or whether to keep the oven at a constant-moderate temperature, somewhere between 300 and 350 degrees F., all the time, and let the bird brown more slowly as it cooks.

Just to get some definite facts on these two methods, Miss Alexander and Mrs. Clarke roasted two whole turkeys and a pair of halves cut according to the 50-50 style. All three of the turkeys weighed around 10 pounds, market weight, that is before they were drawn and with the head and feet on. They were all young and plump. The grading experts classed two of them "Prime" and the other "Choice" -- all very good turkeys. And they were trussed, and stuffed, and salted, and buttered, and floured just as nearly as possible in the same way. And put onto racks in open pans, no lids, and without any water in the pans.

One of the whole turkeys went into an oven heated to 450 degrees and was seared for 30 minutes. Then the heat was lowered to about 300 and held there for 2 hours until the turkey was done, making 2-1/2 hours roasting time in all.

The other whole turkey was roasted at a constant-moderate temperature. The oven was held at about 350 degrees for the 2-1/2 hours it took this bird to cook. It was basted and turned just as the other.

These same two methods were used on the halves of the turkey which were stuffed and roasted separately. It took each of them nearly 2 hours -- almost as long as for the whole turkeys that weighed twice as much.

And the turkeys when they were carved and served - - - - -

MR. SALISBURY: That's the kind of results I'm interested in.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Aren't we all. Well, as far as looks of the turkeys -- they were all a beautiful golden brown, and the pan drippings were just right for gravy. The white meat and dark meat of them all was tender and well cooked.

MR. SALISBURY: So the moral is - - - - -

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, the moral is, you can roast your turkey either way and come out with an excellent result. The main point is moderate heat for the most of the time a turkey is in the oven. That's what cooks it evenly and doesn't dry it out. And basting with fat, never with water, also helps to keep in the juice. If you're using a constant-moderate oven with a big turkey, a 15-pounder or larger, better keep the temperature around 300 degrees. And, roughly, you can count on it taking about 15 minutes to the pound, market weight, for a plump young turkey -- one of this year's raising -- a 1936 streamline model, as you call it, Morse.

MR. SALISBURY: Thank you, Ruth. I'm sorry you couldn't go into the question of stuffings.

MISS VAN DEMAN: We'll have to save that for another day. And just in case I don't get back to the microphone next week, I'm going to wish you now -- a very Merry Christmas.